

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-10

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R 211020Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY SANA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6000

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

USMTM DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

USCINCEUR

COMIDEASTFOR

S E C R E T SANA 1970

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, YE

SUBJECT: YEMENI INTERNAL POLITICS

1. SUMMARY: IN TALK WITH AMBASSADOR RK JULY 20 FOREIGN MINISTER ABDALLAH AL-ASNAG, FOLLOWING HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA, CHARTERED CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS OVER NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS IN YAR AND REVIEWED INTERNAL SITUATION. ASNAG WAS PARTICULARLY PLEASED BY CLEARER THAN EVER INDICIZIONS FROM SAG THAT HAMDI GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN YEMENI INDIVIDUALS OR TRIBES WILL RECEIVE PREPONDERANCE OF SAUDI SUPPORT. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING JULY 20 TALK WITH AMBASSADOR, OUTGOING DCM NEWTON AND INCOMING DCM RANSOM, ASNAG CHARTED POSSIBILITIES FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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OF NEXT WFRERAL MONTHS WITHIN YAR. PRESENT MAJLIS NOW WINDING

UP DEBATE ON PROPOSED BUDGET AND INVESTMENT LAWS, WILL ADJOURN THIS WEEK. THIS ADJOURNMENT MAY BE TERMED A RECESS, BUT ASNAG SAID THAT IN FACT THIS MAJLIS WILL NEVER RECONVENE. ASNAG ENVISIONS NEW ELECTIONS TAKING PLACE FOR NEW MAJLIS SOMETIME LATER THIS YEAR OR EARLY NEXT YEAR, BUT ONLY AFTER CAREFUL PREPARATION WHICH ENSURES THAT THE MAJLIS SUPPORTS PRESIDENT HAMDI AND PRESENT POLICIES.

3. ASNAG IS QUITE OPEN ABOUT NEED TO "GUIDE" NEW ELECTIONS IN WAYS FAMILIAR THROUGHOUT ARAB WORLD. IN THIS HE SEEKS TO AVOID THE UNRELIABILITY OF THE PRESENT MAJLIS, WHICH IS DOMINATED BY TRADITIONAL TRIBAL AND SHAYKLY ELEMENTS. ASNAG CLEARLY FEELS THAT AS FOREIGN (READ SAUDI) SUPPORT FOR TRIBAL LEADERS HAS DRIED UP, THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT CAN SUCCESSFULLY WIELD POWER WITHOUT CONSTANT PROPITIATION OF TRIBAL LEADERS LIKE ABDALLAH AL-AHMAR WHO HAVE LONG CONSIDERED THEMSELVES ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY. BY SAME TOKEN, TIME HAS COME FOR MORE PURPOSEFUL AND FARSIGHTED POLICIES IN FIELD OF DEVELOPMENT, DOMESTIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICAL EVOLUTION. ASNAG NOTED THAT EXILED PRESIDENT ABDUL RAHMAN AL-IRYANI, A "WISE AND DECENT MAN" HAD BEEN ABLE TO FUNCTION ONLY WITHIN THE YEMEN TRADITIONAL ELITE, WITH RESULT THAT POLITICS WERE STATIC. HAMDI, SAID ASNAG, HAS MAINTAINED NOT ONLY HIS TIES WITH THE TRADITIONAL FORCES BUT HAS ESTABLISHED CLOSE LINKS WITH THE EDUCATED AND YOUTHFUL ELEMENTS IN THE COUNTRY.

4. ONE SHORT TERM PROBLEM IS WHAT TO DO ABOUT SHAIKH ABDALLAH. ASNAG ADMITS CANDIDLY THAT THE PRESENT INTENTION IS TO "CUT ABDALLAH DOWN TO SIZE" BUT NEITHER HE NOR HAMDI WANT TO MOVE PRECIPITIOUSLY. ASNAG DESCRIBED HOW HE EXPECTS SAUDI PERSONAL SUBSIDIES TO ABDALLAH TO CONTINUE, AND HOW, JUST LAST WEEK, HAMDI ACCEDED TO ABDALLAH REQUEST FOR 20,000 RIYALS TO STAGE A LARGE MEAL IN AKHAMR. BECAUSE

OF CAUTIOUS AND METHODICAL NATURE OF ASNAG AND HAMDI, THEY ARE CONSIDERING APPOINTING RPT APPOINTING A "CONSULTATIVE MAJLIS" TO ADVISE THE GOVERNMENT ON HOW TO PREPARE FOR NEW ELECTIONS. ABDALLAH MAY HAVE

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A ROLE IN THIS, BUT HIS INFLUENCE WITHIN THE APPOINTED MAJLIS WOULD BE HEDGED AND THE MAJLIS ITSELF WOULD HAVE NO POWER TO BIND THE GOVERNMENT. REAL WORK OF PREPARING ELECTORAL ROLES, SETTING UP CANDIDATES, ETC. WOULD TAKE PLACE THROUGH OTHER ORGANS.

5. ASNAG SAID THAT SAUDIS SEEM SATISFIED WITH HAMDI INTENTION TO PUT OFF ELECTIONS. IT CERTAINLY HAD BEEN

DROPPED AS REAL OR DECLARED OBSTACLE TO INITIATION OF SAUDI FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF YAR MILITARY MODERNIZATION PROGRAM. ASNAG SAID HE TOLD SAUDIS THAT ELECTIONS NOW WOULD RESULT IN NO RPT NO SEAT FOR ABDALLAH AND MEMBERSHIP IN MAJLIS OF MANY ANTI-SAUDI ELEMENTS.

6. SURVEYING THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE ASNAG EXPRESSED SATISFACTION THAT MOST OF THE POTENTIAL RIVALS TO HAMDI WERE ISOLATED--HE SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED MUJAHID ABU SHAWARIB IN THIS CONNECTION--OR FIRMLY IN THE HAMDI CAMP. HAMDI'S POPULARITY IS GROWING, AND A NUMBER OF YAR GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD GONE SOUTH ARE NOW PETITIONING TO RETURN. ASNAG NOTED CAREFULLY THAT ONLY SOME OF THESE WILL BE GIVEN PERMISSION TO RETURN,

LEST SHAIKH ABDALLAH AND OTHERS SIEZE ON THIS AS A PRETEXT FOR CRITICISM.

7. ONE FLY IN THE OINTMENT, IN ASNAG'S VIEW, IS THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR HERE, WHO CONTINUES TO DEAL WITH THE HAMDI GOVERNMENT IN A PATRONIZING WAY AND TO CONCOCT STRATEGIES TO INFLUENCE INTERNAL YEMENI AFFAIRS. ASNAG SAID IRRITABLY THAT AMBASSADOR MUSAID SUDAIRI HAD ALREADY ASKED FOR FUNDS TO USE IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. HE NOTED GLUMLY THAT IT IS AS DIFFICULT TO COMPLAIN TO SULTAN, HOWEVER, ABOUT A MAN WHO WAS AFTER ALL THE SAUDI MIN DEF'S UNCLE AND A PROMINENT MEMBER OF THE SUDAIRI CLAN.

8. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT SAUDI AMBASSADOR, IN LEAGUE WITH TRIBAL TYPES LIKE ABDALLAH ANZE SUDAIRI ELEMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA, STILL HAVE POTENTIAL IN EYES ON ASNAG TO MAKE MISCHIEF HERE. ASNAG EXPRESSED HIS VIEW, HOWEVER, THAT SEVERAL
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ELEMENTS OF SAUDI ROYAL FAMILY--HE MENTIONED PRINCES MISHAL AND ABDALLAH--WERE UNHAPPY WITH ENRICHMENT OF SUDAIRIS DURING COURSE OF PAST SAUDI STRATEGIES IN YEMEN AND HAD THROWN THEIR WEIGHT AGAINST "ANY NEW CIVIL WAR" IN YEMEN. THUS THEY HAVE BECOME "SECRET ALLIES" OF THE YAR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, IN ASNAG'S VIEW. ASNAG ALSO COMMENTED

THAT FAHD WAS THE DOMINATING VOICE IN YEMENI POLICY TODAY, AND DESCRIBED HOW, IN AN HOUR AND A HALF MEETING WITH ASNAG, FAHD SPOKE CONSTANTLY WHILE IN A SIMILAR MEETING WITH SULTAN, THE YEMENIS DID MOST OF THE TALKING. SULTAN DID SAY, HOWEVER, THAT HE IS FORBIDDING ANYONE TO ATTACK HAMDI IN HIS PRESENCE.

9. COMMENT. SEVERAL QUESTIONS COME TO MIND FROM THIS

INTERVIEW. THE FIRST IS WHETHER ONE MAN CAN LONG
DOMINATE THE FISSIPAROUS TENDENCIES OF YEMEN. THE SECOND
IS WHETHER THE POWER REALITIES OF YEMEN WILL ALLOW HAMDI
TO REDUCE OR CONTAIN TRIBAL FIGURES AND TRIBAL INTERESTS
FOR THE SAKE OF A MORE PURPOSEFUL AND MODERNIZING
CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. THE NORTHERN TRIBES, IN THE POPULAR
CONCEPTION BOTH LOCALLY AND ABROAD, HAVE ALWAYS DOMINATED
YEMENI POLITICAL AFFAIRS BY FORCE MAJEURE, DRAWING
COMETIMES ON SAUDI MONEY. THE THIRD QUESTION IS WHAT
WILL HAPPEN TO HAMDI PERSONALLY IF HE SUCCEEDS IN DOMINATING
THE POLITICAL PROCESS HERE AND ELIMINATING HIS RIVALS.
ON ALL THREE OF THESE POINTS THE PROGNOSIS MUST AT
THIS TIME CONTINUE TO BE FAVORABLE TO HAMDI, WHILE
HE
PERSUASIVELY ARGUES.
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